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ABSTRACT

Aspects of statewide planning are discussed from the viewpoint of an institutional administrator, a systemwide administrator, and a legislator. The institutional perspective encompasses the tri-state system and enlightened authority. The system viewpoint emphasizes the presidential stance and the legislative perspective and reviews the need for coordination and training for employability. (MJM)

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Statewide Planning: Three Viewpoints

The trend toward statewide planning for higher education, the pressures behind the trend, and the sometimes-sticky problems involved were the subject of a Society for College and University Planning conference last March 11. The following article is adapted from the remarks of three conference panelists and represents a discussion of statewide planning from three viewpoints: the institutional administrator (Dr. James L. Fisher, president, Towson State College, Maryland), the systemwide administrator (Dr. G. Theodore Mitau, chancellor, Minnesota State College System), and the legislator (Joseph C. Harder, chairman, Education Committee, Kansas State Senate).

FROM THE INSTITUTION

My intention is to give you my impressions of master planning. I will speak of state, regional, and federal planning and I would like to venture some comments concerning the 1202 commissions. By way of immediate preamble, I think it is necessary to declare in a straightforward fashion my support for an external central authority, which I believe to be the most effective way to provide master planning and coordination for a state or region. I should also say that I am less enthusiastic about regional and national planning because of the amorphousness of the subject in my mind and my personal frustrations in dealing with the federal bureaucracy.

Furthermore, I believe that we are absolutely incapable of real educational renewal operating from an institutional premise—that is, at the campus level. The entire history of American higher education supports this contention: witness today the condition of higher education in states unfettered by real external authority. Therefore, I strike what I consider a happy and productive medium—statewide planning—because I fear the distance of a remote and unresponsive federal authority and I am certain of the inability of ageing institutions to perform radical surgery on themselves.

Today in Maryland, the situation is at best transitional and partisan positions abound. We serve as a national prototype of isolated institutional excellence and little effective coordination and cooperation, the results of which are most surely a waste of tax dollars, confusion, unnecessary duplication, and a general air of suspicion born of provincial certainty. In this condition, deserving faculty members are not paid what they should be, the public does not get what it should rightfully expect, and students bear the unhappy consequences.

A TRI-PARTITE SYSTEM

We currently have what is called a tri-partite system of higher education. Each segment represents a separate, distinct constituency. First is the University of Maryland and its branches. Second is the Community College System, with 15 institutions jointly supported by county governments and state funds. And third is the State College System, of which Towson is the largest of six institutions. These three elements, ostensibly balanced in their different concerns, are, by the same token, remarkably different. Bear in mind that I believe that being different can very often be in the public interest. I would simply like to see those differences planned and measured rather than based on historical and untested assumptions. Theoretically, this disparity is mitigated by the existence of the Maryland Council for Higher Education (MCHE), which sits precariously atop the uneven-legged tripod of the three-part system. MCHE functions as an advisory arm of the executive branch and recommends policy to the executive and consequently to the legislature.

The Maryland Council for Higher Education is at the moment the nearest thing to a coordinating-planning entity for all of higher education in Maryland. Its powers recently were enhanced by an act of the legislature to include new program review authority. Its coordinating powers, however, still are advisory, which is to say nonexistent.

The practice has proven as vague and inconsequential as the calibre of my description may suggest. Given the

current weakness of the Council, the three segments continue to be tacitly encouraged to go their separate ways, without concern for or effective communication with their fellows. As you may have assumed, the University of Maryland, owing to its size and budget, wields the most influence. The community colleges, because of their dependency on both county and state governments, can court neither side to the exclusion of the other and stand in isolation. And the State College System is wedged between the two, moving from a position of public apology to unrewarded appreciation.

ENLIGHTENED AUTHORITY

The obvious answer for Maryland lies in the development and implementation of some kind of enlightened external authority over all of public higher education, an authority with sufficient strength to restrict the provincial aspirations of institutions in order to maintain and enhance the public interest. In the long run, both the society and the institutions will prosper. While I do not see enlightened central authority as a panacea, I do believe that, given the public mood of the moment, the fiscal limitations of the day, and the educational objectives we purportedly espouse, that there is no other viable decision.

This brings us necessarily, if not logically, full cycle and back to the 1202 commissions or, as they are formally titled, "State Post-Secondary Commissions." As you know, as of last week all activity relative to their establishment was suspended by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In my judgment, few should mourn their apparent demise. At the heart of most objections to the 1202 commissions was the conviction that they posed the very unhappy spectre of the federal government institutionalizing our most selfish and parochial interests. To my mind, these 1202 commissions are anchored in the kind of institutional parochialism which is at the root of the problems besetting American higher education today.

Without question, the only hope for refocusing higher education on the needs of the students and the public lies in improved coordination at the state level and complemented at the national level. I doubt seriously if there is a case on record where a college or university—or a system of colleges or universities—has participated directly in statewide coordination, when it felt it had a direct stake in the outcome, without making every legitimate (and many not-so-legitimate) attempt to subvert coordination. In the case of the proposed 1202 commissions, the situation is compounded when the institutions (or systems or representatives of institutions) are invited to participate directly as members of whatever agency is charged with undertaking the coordination. As David Sweet, president of Minnesota Metropolitan State College, recently wrote, "If the federal government, through these guidelines, attempts to compel us to turn the clock back to an era of no decisions, it will be tragic."

I am delightfully surprised to see that the tragedy President Sweet foresaw has for the moment been averted. As desirable as is state planning coordination, it cannot be constituted in the manner intended by the federal government. The Maryland Council is tainted in similar fashion with system representatives and, if there were unflattering implications in my description of this would-be coordinating body, they are the consequence of this basic flaw in the Council's composition. With university, state college, and private college representatives as members, the Council continually retreats to the most generalized positions in search of a consensus. Historically, this kind of bureaucratic ineffectiveness has provided the impetus for the emergence of a man on a white horse. If that premonition is not sufficiently threatening, I don't know any other liability or logic more likely to encourage us to construct workable coordinating entities that will serve the public interest.

James L. Fisher

FROM THE SYSTEM

I very much agree with most of what Dr. Fisher explicated so very effectively with respect to the need for statewide planning. As a matter of fact, Dr. Lyman Glenny of the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education at the University of California at Berkeley, has expressed some of the same thoughts in this fashion:

"Given the experience of the past decade with the increasingly sophisticated staff of the state planning and coordinating boards in 27 states, one can expect that the world of education beyond the high school will undergo a radical transformation. No major institutionalized segment of it will be left out of the planning as in the past. Private colleges and proprietary schools will have to be included. A new delivery system of education and new technologies, with potential for extending education into the home, the office, and other places as easily as in an educational setting, will increasingly become a matter of major attention by planners and coordinators. Fortunately for students of all ages, parochial interests in single segments of education are giving way to a more cosmic view of not only which institutions should be legitimatized as educational performers but as a very character of the educational content and the processes necessary for both education and training in the chal-

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lenging era to which we are now committed."

Indeed, Dr. Glenny may be overly sanguine; he may somewhat underestimate what might be called some residual factors—resistances, demands for autonomy, commitment to local self-determination with regard to curricular matters—which confront us now and will continue to be present for the rest of this decade. However, events are moving very quickly, and I think President Fisher is right—the man on the white horse is here already. In case you have not recognized him, he's your governor or his bureau of the budget. If you have watched what has occurred lately in various midwestern states, you are aware of the similarity of attitudes expressed and actions taken by their respective governors relative to higher education.

There are, of course, other aspects that need to be emphasized. What is now needed is not only statewide planning but also very effective coordination of systems' missions, enrollment projections, physical facilities planning, and programattic development. Unless program review occurs in concert with a coordinated effort in these other areas, the product of our planning process will be unrealistic and out of balance.

THE PRESIDENTIAL STANCE

However, it should be noted that probably 90 per cent of President Fisher's colleagues in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU)—and various other and more exclusive clubs—would take strong exception to his views. It might be of interest to you that chancellors—such strange, bureaucratic creatures as we are—are not even permitted full membership is AASCU. Many have not quite realized that we are a part of the family. They have relegated us to that strange and amorphous category which is comprised of coordinating executives and coordinating boards. So Fisher's is a maladjusted and minority voice. No one should take his views as the party line of most of his presidential colleagues.

I would like to leave you with one particular thought. There is a need for an innovative solution to the whole matter of alternative planning formulas for decreasing enrollment patterns and problems. I come from a state where we are experiencing decreasing enrollments, while most of you still are adding significant numbers, particularly in urban areas. I come from a state that suddenly finds itself in a very difficult situation, aggravated and accentuated by over-enthusiasm for junior collges and area vocational-technical institutes, in a state that is characterized by small-town population erosion and other rural problems, including, in some instances, poverty and low income levels. As a result, Minnesota suddenly is faced with a very difficult downward adjustment to accommodate an enrollment decrease of 9 per cent in the system.

Such a setting leads to all kinds of anxieties and neuroses and we are learning some fascinating things. (There should be) aggressive development of some alternative plan of handling down-turning enrollment problems. We must address ourselves to the question of what it means, in terms of planning, to reduce rather than expand. There is very little literature in this area and very little experience.

Finally, one brief caveat regarding President Fisher's enthusiasm for a non-system-involved state planning group. We have a good state planning agency in Minnesota and, basically, I think he's right. However, Dr. William Anderson, my professor many years ago, used to say that, in democracy, the expert is on tap and the generalist is on top. Admittedly, this is a cliche but it does apply here. The generalists—the citizen-members, in other words—of these planning and coordinating agencies ought to be genuine citizen members, with no ax to grind. Now it occasionally happens that governors appoint people to these commissions who are less than "disinterested" parties. They are, of course, not infallible in their view of what is good for higher education and, as a matter of fact, some are ill-concealed pleaders for the viewpoints of husbands, wives, or friends who work for certain segments of the post-secondary spectrum. Thus, what the legislature thought was eliminated—special-system influence—is coming back in ways strange to behold.

G. Theodore Mitau

FROM THE LEGISLATURE

Planning measures which are not closely tied to the decision-making process are likely to be unproductive. I have come to view with some skepticism the delegation of master planning assignments to persons relatively unconnected to political decision-making. What often happens, it seems to me, is that they develop recommendations, one or more of which are so politically impractical that the plan is discounted, even though some of the recommendations may be meritorious.

For example, the master planning commission in my state recommended separate governing boards for each of the six state universities and colleges. We are not about to take this step. We are not only generally pleased with our single governing body, the State Board of Regents, but we are thinking of giving the board responsibility for the operations of the junior colleges as well. Perhaps that would be a mistake but my point is simply that legislators will not take seriously any planning recommendations if major proposals appear to be impossible of realization. Only in a crisis situation is it possible to obtain serious consideration of a plan which proposes a radical change.

Planning endeavors ought to include calculation of the potential difficulties in legislative implementation. Given the incremental nature of policy making, modest recommendations, which assume further changes in time, are potentially the most helpful to the legislature. Perhaps it follows that legislators ought to be involved in planning studies and that interim legislative committees, with special staffs selected for their expertise, offer the

best vehicle to achieve this end. By such involvement in planning studies, the legislators who must carry the bills implementing planning recommendations become better able to perform their function.

More often than not, federal categorical grant programs hamper more than they assist. A bureaucratic structure evolves from grant-in-aid programs and it is more difficult to phase out or revamp a structure than it is to create an organization where none exists. The 1202 amendments illustrate my point. Had we been requried to create the machinery suggested by the task force, some of our best-laid plans for the governance of higher education would have been threatened.

Planning for higher education ought to be coordinated in some manner with the budgetary process. Budgeting decisions usually are the decisions which allocate values. Meritorious programs which come to the legislature in bill form but which have not been considered in the budgetary process may be enacted, but without adequate financial support. Similarly, given the present mood to reduce the size of bureaucratic establishments, planning efforts must consider the effects of recommendations on the number and kind of personnel required.

THE NEED FOR COORDINATION

There has been very little significant coordination among individual postsecondary institutions or among types of institutions. The attempts have been sporadic and confined to levels or types of postsecondary education. The breadth of such activities has not taken into account the total needs of the state and the citizenry. The existing postsecondary system does not fully reflect such factors as educational aspirations of all citizens, manpower needs of the state, projected economic conditions affecting employment, social needs, better and more efficient use of human and natural resources, and consumer needs of the citizenry. A reasonable choice of educational programs as well as a convenient location have not been available to all interested in a postsecondary education.

Although the Board of Regents and the State Board of Education have some distinct responsibilities, they also share responsibilities on many fronts, often resulting in competition for available state dollars. These and related problem areas cannot be fully explored without continuous planning.

The need for planning becomes very apparent when, as a legislator, I note that, far too frequently, educators are so provincial that they fail to note that a person's ability to contribute to society requires different kinds of skill: working with ideas, working with things, and working with people. To help individuals find their place in the working world, the postsecondary educational system should provide opportunities for adults to acquire saleable skills in one or more of these three categories. Despite the abundance of collges and vocational schools, the postsecondary needs of many citizens are not being met. Broad educational opportunities are severely limited in urban areas, particularly for minority segments of the population. Others whose needs are not being adequately provided for include veterans, adults, handicapped, disadvantaged, and others with obsolete or otherwise unsaleable skills.

TRAINING FOR EMPLOYABILITY

While we are planning—or perhaps I should say, if we are planning—let us take into account the fact that the value of an educated citizenry cannot be measured in terms of economics alone. The current mismatch between the product of the postsecondary system and the demands of the marketplace has reached a magnitude where training for employability must be given greater consideration. The large number of individuals educated for professional positions who are finding difficulty in obtaining employment in their field is costly in terms of time, energy, self-worth, financial resources, and unfulfilled needs of the economy.

Many employers contribute to the overemphasis on four-year and graduate education by using degrees and diplomas, even if irrelevant to job requirements, as a filtering system for employee selection. This is not to discount the great value to society of the non-vocational curricula offered in our colleges and universities, on which society depends for much of its innovation and statesmanship. The present emphasis is with the overemphasis on degree-producing studies, which has produced a poor match between manpower supply and demand.

It appears to me that, in planning for higher education, we must take into account all of postsecondary education; we must take into account the role of the vocational school, the junior college, the private college, as well as state insitutions of higher learning. A master planning commission must conduct studies in the area of student needs and aspirations, enrollment projections and corresponding budget requirements, alternative institutional systems, long-range needs of the economy, and critical social, economic, and political factors, in addition to analyzing the existing system projected into the future.

I am not sure that planning can be limited to a single state. There is room for exploration of consortiums among neighboring states, at least in the areas of specific, high-cost programs.

In conclusion, may I state that master planning is important—perhaps far too important to be left solely to the professional educator. The legislator, upon whose shoulders the burden of implementing a plan usually falls, should at least play a role in the planning process.

Joseph C. Harder